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ABSTRACT

Intended for managers of child care programs, this brochure lists the basic components of a clearly defined personnel policy. The guide is based on the personnel practices and experiences of more than 1,200 Head Start programs serving over 442,000 children nationwide. Emphasis is given to staff recruitment, screening, and the selection process. Guidance is also briefly provided in the area of policies related to child abuse and neglect, and suggestions are offered on monitoring new staff performance. Also included in the brochure is a list of social services block grant state contacts for regions I through X. (RH)

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Recruitment & Selection of Staff:

A Guide for Managers of Preschool & Child Care Programs

PS 014756

Introduction

The staff members of a child care or preschool program are the most important element in the successful operation of the program. It is the staff that is responsible for creating and maintaining a safe and healthy learning environment in which each child's individual needs can be identified and addressed. And it is the staff that is responsible for developing a partnership with parents to promote the well-being of the child.

Because of these key rules, each program should have written personnel policies designed for the protection of both employees and the children. They should provide employees with a clear understanding of the work requirements and responsibilities. Equally important, they should provide program managers with a carefully developed recruitment, screening and selection process for ensuring that staff members can adequately perform the work requirements and handle the accompanying responsibilities.

This brochure provides program managers with a list of the basic components of a clearly defined personnel policy with an emphasis on the importance of staff recruitment, screening and the selection process. It also provides guidance to program managers in the area of policies related to child abuse and neglect. Suggestions are also offered on monitoring new staff performance.

RECRUITMENT, SCREENING AND SELECTION OF PROGRAM STAFF

Every preschool and child-care program should have clearly written personnel policies that are updated periodically and available to all employees. At a minimum, they should include: job descriptions; compensation and leave policies; a performance appraisal system; and resignation and termination policies. Policies on employee recruitment, screening and selection should also be an integral part of an organization's personnel policies.

The goal of any recruitment and selection system should be to hire the best qualified person for the job, whether it be an outside person qualified for a vacancy, or a current staff member qualifying for a higher position. The entire process should allow individuals to be recruited, examined and appointed to positions within the child care or pre-school program on a fair and equitable basis. The elements of a good system include:

- announcing the vacancy;
- examining the qualifications of candidates;
- interviewing candidates who qualify;
- observing finalists in the job for which they are applying;
- checking public records on the individual chosen for the job, and;
- hiring the best qualified person.

Some agencies and programs may find it helpful to form a personnel committee to perform the above functions and make recommendations for final selections to the appropriate program official or governing board. Parents, line supervisors and other staff members can also be very useful in the recruitment and selection of candidates.

Programs should be aware of the following federal and/or state requirements when establishing recruitment and selection procedures:

- Federal policies and regulations regarding equal employment opportunity and non-discrimination.
- Requirements in some states regarding checking prior convictions for child abuse and child sexual abuse (sometimes requiring or allowing fingerprinting).

As this guide was being prepared, Congress passed and the President signed into law a modification of the Social Service Block Grant which makes available to States $25,000,000 for the purpose of training and retraining child care providers, State licensing and enforcement officials, and parents in the prevention of child abuse in child care settings. In addition, Public Law 98-473 provides that:

> (2)(A) Any State receiving an allotment under such title from the funds made available as a result of subsection (a) shall have in effect, not later than September 30, 1985—
>
> (i) procedures, established by State law or regulation, to provide for employment history and background checks; and
>
> (ii) provisions of State law, enacted in accordance with the provisions of Public Law 92-544 (86 Stat. 115) requiring nationwide criminal record checks for all operators, staff or employees, or prospective operators, staff or employees of child care facilities (including any facility or program having primary custody of children for 20 hours or more per week), juvenile detention, correction or treatment facilities, with the objective of protecting the children involved and promoting such children's safety and welfare while receiving service through such facilities or programs.

For the most current information on how your state is planning to implement this law, you may want to contact the person responsible for the Social Service Block Grant in your state. A list of the appropriate person to contact is included at the end of this brochure.

A. Advertisement of Vacancies

Recruitment and hiring should be a fair and equitable process. Programs should advertise vacancies to staff as well as other known sources of employees. Advertisements should also be used to alert the general public to staff vacancies so that recruitment is not narrowed to only a select few. Advertising serves to ensure that the recruitment of candidates is an open competitive process.

Advertisements should be distributed by various means throughout the community. Announcing vacancies can be accomplished by putting announcements on bulletin boards at centers, advertising the position in local newpapers, posting an announcement in other community agencies, alerting local employment bureaus, and distributing vacancy notices to staff and parents.

To be effective, a vacancy announcement should contain sufficient information to enable a person to decide whether or not to apply. Generally, this information should include:

- Job title and qualification requirements, including a brief description of the work responsibilities, where the position fits within the program, and a concise statement of the criteria (e.g. type and duration of experience, credentials) to be used in hiring.
- Salary or salary range and fringe benefits.
- Career advancement opportunities.
- A non-discrimination policy statement that an equal employment opportunity will be provided to candidates.
- Information on how to apply, including where to apply for the position; the name, address and phone number of the program; the individual to contact; the date by which applications must be received and other details that will help candidates apply for the position.

B. Determining Candidates' Qualifications

It is advisable to establish an applicant file for each qualified individual who applies. This file should contain the application forms, resumes, correspondence, background information, results of interviews and any other information that will serve as a resource to assist in the choice of the best qualified candidate for the position. The application file will also later serve as evidence that the selection was fair, open, competitive and resulted in the hiring of the best person for the position.

Each candidate should complete an application form and provide supplemental information as necessary to demonstrate that he/she is qualified for the position. The application form should, at a minimum, contain the name, address and telephone number of the applicant, applicant's present job and reason for wanting to leave, educational level, employment history, special skills and other accomplishments and references.

The determination of candidates' qualifications should not be confined only to a review of the written information that has been provided. Several other techniques should be used to make certain the candidate is qualified. These should include:

- an interview with the candidates;
- a check of references;
- verification of the accuracy of the information provided by the candidates;
- a performance test or, if possible, an opportunity to observe the candidates in the job for which they are applying;
- a search for information about the candidates from those who know them;
- a solicitation of opinions from those who have worked with the candidates, especially from parents whose children have been under the candidates' care; and
- a comparison of the qualifications of all applicants with the position requirements.

An analysis of the information generated from all these sources should aid the program in making a fair and objective decision in determining those individuals whose qualifications most closely match the specific position descriptions and whose applications should be considered further.

C. Candidate Interview, Observation and Record Check

Once the field of candidates has been narrowed, a number of additional steps should be taken. These include:

- an interview with each candidate whose qualifications are close to those that are required;
- if possible, an opportunity to observe the candidate in the job for which they are applying; and
- a check of public records related to child abuse and neglect convictions.

The interview process is important because the program manager and other interested individuals have an opportunity to meet the candidates and make decisions about their attitudes, capabilities, temperament and other characteristics that may be pertinent in making the final selection. Interviews may be conducted by a personnel committee composed of such persons as the program manager, representatives of governing boards, and/or the supervisor or staff who will be working directly with the employee. The personnel committee members should have a specific list of questions to be asked of each candidate based on the position description and the personal characteristics and qualifications that are desired.

Responses should be documented and ranked in some manner to justify final selections. This documentation should include established checklists, questionnaires or other formats that can

be referred to later in making objective decisions about a candidate's capabilities.

All job candidates should be required to list references on their application form, and all references should be contacted by the hiring agency to obtain relevant information about the candidate. In addition, it may be useful to contact previous co-workers and parents of children who have been under the care of the applicant. Since most people tend to report only favorable information about others, the inquirer must usually "dig" to get a full story. This may require spending some time describing the job for which the candidate has applied, discussing the candidate's past job responsibilities and performance and talking about potential performance in the new job. Possible questions to be asked as part of a reference check might include:

- How does the applicant relate to children? Does the applicant enjoy working with children and do children enjoy being with the applicant?
- Did the applicant come to work on time? How often was the applicant absent from work?
- How well does the applicant accept responsibility? Is the applicant reliable in terms of being prepared for the job at hand and completing jobs assigned? Does the applicant handle problems well and persevere until the job is completed?
- How well does the applicant get along with supervisors, subordinates, and parents? Is the applicant considered easy to work with? Is the applicant cooperative?
- Is the applicant honest and trustworthy?
- In what areas of the new job would you expect the candidate to do very well? With what areas would the candidate have problems?

Reference checks are best done by phone or through face-to-face contact with the reference to allow for the fullest possible discussion. Regardless of how the reference checks are conducted, careful notes should be taken on the information provided and made an official part of the data to be considered when determining who to select for the job.

When the number of candidates is narrowed to the best qualified, an effort should be made to observe each finalist in the position for which they applied. If the candidate is currently employed in a similar job, permission should be secured for one or two persons to observe this individual. If this is not possible, the candidate should be asked to spend some time in the new job for the purposes of observation. It is appropriate for the candidate to be paid for this time, if necessary.

Once the final selection has been made, it is extremely important to check all available public records regarding evidence of child abuse, sexual child abuse or child neglect by the candidate. These records should be sought at the State, county and local level. The extent to which such records are available to the public vary greatly from state to state. Any findings of criminal behavior should be examined by the personnel committee in light of the program's personnel policies that deal with the protection of the children from abuse and neglect.

D. Final Selection and Hiring

The final selection should be based on judgments about each candidate's qualifications, reference and record checks and the results of their interview and observation. If the personnel committee is empowered to make the final selection, the appropriate program official should be informed of their final choice. An alternative process would include the submission of the names of the three most qualified candidates to the appropriate program official for final selection. The governing bodies of the child care or preschool program may also be responsible for approving the selection.

The successful candidate should be informed of his/her selection and the unsuccessful candidates should be notified after the chosen candidate has accepted. There should then be an official announcement of the selection. If unsuccessful candidates wish to know why they were not selected, the program should be prepared to justify its decision and refer to the documentation of selection procedures in showing why the candidate who was selected was deemed the best qualified.

E. Probationary or Trial Period

Most programs establish a probationary or trial period for new employees. This is particularly the case when it has not been possible to observe the new employee in working with children. The probationary period should always be of fixed duration, and the employee should always be made aware of it before he or she accepts the job. Usually, the move from probationary employment status to permanent is accompanied by salary increase or the extension of one or more fringe benefits which were not previously provided.

PROTECTING PRESCHOOL AND DAY CARE CHILDREN FROM CHILD ABUSE AND NEGLECT

A major consideration for every program serving children should be to protect those children from abuse and neglect. Every program has a responsibility to inform staff of appropriate Federal, state, local and program regulations regarding child abuse and neglect. Written policies should be provided to each staff regarding:

- a code of conduct for staff relating to their behavior with children,
- policies on reporting suspected child abuse and neglect,
- policies on investigating existing staff or staff candidates in regard to child abuse and neglect, and
- policies on hiring staff previously accused, indicted and/or found guilty of child abuse and neglect.

The most important step program managers can take to guard against child abuse and neglect is to ensure that there is adequate day to day supervision of all staff.

MONITORING NEW STAFF

Each program must have a system for monitoring the performance of all staff in the program and must make an extra effort to monitor new staff members. The responsibility for this monitoring lies formally with the individual's supervisor and informally with parents.

It is the supervisor's responsibility to insure that a new staff member's performance is monitored through observation and discussion during and after the probationary period. Especially during the probationary period, the program manager and supervisor should drop in and visit the new employee on the job during work hours to determine whether or not the individual is performing in a satisfactory manner.

Monitoring of the employee by parents is also important. Parents should be encouraged to drop in and visit the new employee. Parents should also be encouraged to listen to and talk with their children everyday and to learn about the child's concerns and problems. Information on good child care practices, the program schedule, and activities and information on child abuse should be provided to parents to enable them to understand program operations and to quickly identify problems, and act on them immediately.

SOCIAL SERVICES BLOCK GRANT STATE CONTACTS BY REGION (Regions I - X)

REGION I

Connecticut

Mr. James Harris
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(203) 566-3318

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Mr. Michael R. Petit
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State House
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(207) 868-2736

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Ms. Marie A. Matava
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New Hampshire

Mr. Sylvio L. Dupuis
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Hazen Drive
Concord, New Hampshire 03301
(603) 271-4334

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Mr. Joseph F. Murray
Director
Department of Social and Rehabilitation Services
Aime J. Forand State Office Bldg.
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Cranston, Rhode Island 02920
(401) 464-2121

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Waterbury, Vermont 05679
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REGION II

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New York State Department of Social Services
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Albany, New York 12243
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New Jersey Department of Human Services
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Puerto Rico

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Puerto Rico Department of Social Services
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Virgin Islands

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REGION III

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Pennsylvania Department of Public Welfare,
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Virginia

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West Virginia

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State Department of Human Services
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REGION IV

Alabama

Dr. Leon Frazier
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Administrative Building
64 North Union Street
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and

Mr. W. M. "Bill" Rushton
Director
State Department of Economic and Community
Affairs
Room 101
State Capitol
Montgomery, Alabama 36130
(205) 832-6532

Florida

Mr. David H. Pingree
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Department of Health and Rehabilitation
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1323 Winewood Boulevard
Tallahassee, Florida 32301
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Georgia

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South Carolina

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Tennessee

Mrs. Sammie Lynn Puett
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111-19 7th Avenue, North
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REGION V

Illinois

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